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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 ISLAMABAD 005160

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PK](#) [PREL](#) [EAID](#) [PHUM](#)
SUBJECT: USG SUPPORT FOR CREDIBLE PAKISTANI ELECTIONS

REF: A. ISLAMABAD 5054
[B](#). ISLAMABAD 4947
[C](#). ISLAMABAD 4832

[1](#). (U) Summary: Pakistanis will go to the polls on January 8 to choose new National and Provincial Assemblies. It appears that none of the three major parties will receive enough votes to independently form a government, so political vote swapping and coalition building is in full swing. Pakistan has a history of flawed elections, but our goal is to do everything possible to make these elections credible. The Mission is implementing a multi-year democratization/electoral program with USG and international partners, who now meet weekly to coordinate activities. International Republican Institute (IRI) election observers will begin arriving next week; IRI will field a total of 65 observers coupled by The Asia Foundation's (TAF) 20,000 domestic observers. Ref A describes Embassy's request for additional personnel and funding to support our own election observation mission. End summary.

What's at Stake?

[2](#). (SBU) On January 8, Pakistanis will vote to fill 342 seats in the National Assembly and a total of 728 seats in four Provincial Assemblies (Ref B). Despite discussion of a possible boycott, it is likely that all the major political parties will participate in the elections. Preliminary analysis indicates this could be a tight three-way race among the major parties -- Musharraf's Pakistan Muslim League (PML), Nawaz Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and Benazir Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party (PPP) -- leaving the smaller ethno-nationalist and religious parties holding the key to forming a coalition government.

[3](#). (SBU) The results of the election and the ensuing horse-trading to form a coalition will determine Pakistan's government -- the Prime Minister and 38 federal ministers. Also, the new National Assembly may be called upon to ratify Musharraf's actions under the state of emergency, void corruption charges/convictions against former prime minister Benazir Bhutto, and remove the two-term limit for prime ministers Bhutto and Sharif.

Democracy Programs Long in the Works

¶4. (U) Mission Pakistan has been preparing for the 2008 general elections through a multi-year, interagency democratization/electoral program. With the overall strategic goal of strengthening the democratic process, our program has focused on eight goals: (1) computerizing a clean voter list, (2) improving election administration, (3) reviewing and updating the legal framework for elections, (4) encouraging regular interaction between Pakistan's Election Commission (ECP) and the political parties, (5) ensuring voters are better informed on election issues and procedures, (6) supporting independent election observation, (7) enhancing the independence of the ECP, and (8) strengthening the election dispute resolution process.

¶5. (U) USAID provided \$19 million to IFES to computerize the 2007 voter roll, build capacity within the ECP to manage the new computerized voter roll, provide voter education during the voter roll display period, and purchase 215,000 transparent ballot boxes. (Note: Japan purchased another 215,000 of these ballot boxes.)

¶6. (U) Starting in 2004, USAID also spent \$1.7 million, through the National Democratic Institute (NDI), to modernize and democratize Pakistan's political parties, improve their internal governance structures and processes, and encourage the emergence of a new generation of reform-minded party leaders.

¶7. (U) State's DRL provided \$1.4 million to NDI to enhance the capacity of women politicians and candidates, increase opportunities for young political party activists to play a more significant role in party activities, facilitate the development and adoption of a code of conduct for political

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parties, train the parties' poll watchers, and encourage voter awareness and participation in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA).

¶8. (U) Embassy's Public Affairs Section sponsored veteran journalist Arnold "Skip" Isaacs to conduct training workshops in the Peshawar area, throughout Punjab, and in Islamabad and Karachi for Pakistani journalists on best professional practices when covering elections. PAS's Information Resource Center provided material at the ECP's request for a handbook it is compiling for election observers.

Focused on January 8 Elections

¶9. (SBU) The remaining components of the USG's democratization/electoral program are focused on the January 8 election day. These projects are almost exclusively intended to stem electoral fraud. Our stated objective has been a free, fair and transparent election -- something which no one can claim has ever been achieved in the country's history and which, despite the best efforts, is unlikely this time.

¶10. (SBU) Election discrepancies can be said to include a bloated voter roll because the former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court ordered the annexation of the corrupted 2002 list to the clean 2007 list. Luckily, the two lists remain segregated, so our investment to computerize the voter roll (para 5) can still serve as a foundation for future elections. Opposition parties also warn of "ghost" (non-existent) polling stations, pre-stuffed ballot boxes, and misreported totals from the polling stations to the reporting office.

More Eyes and Ears

¶11. (U) DRL is supporting the International Republican Institute's (IRI) observation mission with \$2 million. IRI had planned for 40 observers, including 22 long-term

observers arriving immediately. It appears now that USAID will be able to supplement this mission with an additional \$1 million to fund 25 additional short-term observers. IRI is establishing seven hubs throughout Pakistan, targeting key population centers, historically fraud-prone areas and possible swing districts.

¶12. (U) Mission Pakistan has identified 84 districts which we believe are worth watching. Some will be close contests, others may switch parties, and many are infamous for fraud. We will field a robust, mission-wide effort of 20-25 observer teams, which should be able to cover many of these "watch list" districts. We will also coordinate with "like minded" missions, particularly with the British High Commission, in order to further extend the reach of bilateral diplomat-observers.

¶13. (U) USAID will contribute \$700,000 toward a joint project with other international donors, supporting Pakistani NGO Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN) in fielding 20,000 domestic observers in 110 districts. USAID also is supporting UNDP's training of polling staff as well as domestic and international observers (including Mission Pakistan staff) with \$1.5 million.

¶14. (SBU) Our efforts are rounded out by DRL funding at \$2 million for FAFEN's parallel vote tabulation (PVT) and voter attitude survey. FAFEN pollsters will set up camp at 30 randomly selected polling stations throughout the country. Nearly 8,000 sample points will be gathered to extrapolate parallel results. These results, however, will not be released until 48 hours after the election close. Opposition parties, specifically the PPP, have asked for a PVT in particular as a check on electoral fraud (allegedly by the ruling PML).

¶15. (SBU) Comment: Only a government that is perceived as being legitimate can provide the kind of effective partner the USG needs to fight the battle against extremism. We are under no illusions that elections in Pakistan will be

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completely free and fair, but we are doing everything we can to ensure that the elections are credible in the eyes of the Pakistani people and the international community. End comment.

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